



## Breeders' Briefcase

by Cindy Long

Chair of the Breeders' Education Committee

### Mentors and Mentees Part One of Three

By Lisa Dubé Forman

Reprinted by permission of the author and The Canine Chronicle.

The very definition of mentor is a person who advises or person who aids another in achieving a goal. It is the process of passing on one's knowledge to someone you deem worthy. The definition is fairly simple and it would appear at the outset that such an action would be commonplace; however in the art of breeding dogs the process is rare – amazingly rare. Why?

Well that's the \$64,000 question! I will add that perhaps a portion of the readers will have no clue as to what I am alluding to when using this catch phrase. That's alright because it goes along with the theme of this topic and they can go look up the phrase and in the process they will be educating themselves and, gasp, learning! So I ponder why breeder mentoring is so uncommon?

I believe it begins with our society's priorities and goals being vastly divergent. We live in a society of instant gratification. The desire for relatively quick or immediate satisfaction and fulfillment is evident in many of today's sports. For instance, let us look at baseball and some of its players with their blatant disregard for the fact that millions of young children look to them as role

models. We the public are frequently informed via the media of alleged performance enhancing drug use by the players: illegal steroids or other banned substances used to provide outstanding statistics. This is also the case in track & field events. Many are not alleged uses but are confessions by the players themselves owning up to their wrongdoings. Another example is the sport of kings - horse racing. Here we have the wide usage of Lasix which is used when the horse is bleeding in the lungs due to the stress of running. Those knowledgeable on the subject believe one of the causes for this widespread epidemic is due to the overwhelming indiscriminate breeding to fulfill the demand for faster and faster racing stock. There are also a myriad of substances that allow a horse to work and race through their pain via anti-inflammatory drugs, specific steroids, and pain relievers. There supposedly exists a Racing Consortium created in 2002 to oversee and address the issues; despite this there remain widespread offenses. Why? Because racing enthusiasts and fans want faster and faster horses. They want to see more excitement at the track and, therefore, the breeders and trainers indulge the screaming public by breeding unsound stock that once had

an incredibly quick turn of the foot but broke down due to unsoundness. It is all about the win. In today's society we measure success by the wins.

The above provides a "quick dip of the toe into the pool" as to what motivates people today and has in the past several decades. Lets face it, times and people have changed and no one can argue with that. I have read several interesting articles on mentoring over the years but the topic remains still very much unexplored. So here we go.

We start with the need. Breed mentoring is incredibly important. It provides the novice or protégé (the pupil or apprentice or student) an opportunity. We all know the saying, "when opportunity comes knocking" and we are told to recognize it when it does. Canine breeding is a bailiwick in which a protégé can study and ask numerous questions and your mentor will answer with clarity, soundness and, if fortunate enough, a historical accounting to warrant their answers or reasons.

Many of today's breeders did not mature under the guidance of an established and distinguished breeder or judge. I suspect one of the reasons why is because many view the process as an imposition. To be mentored may entail developing under the guidance of a breeder or judge who lives a significant distance from the mentee. The mentee cites that it is not possible to visit and learn under the guidance of a mentor due to reasons such as airline expense, little to no free time, conflicting work and/or dog show schedules, and family commitments. Many times the mentee deems it unnecessary to do this anyway and would not consider

partaking in such a time consuming procedure. Many of them feel that having attended dog shows for a length of time, having memorable win records, and sitting and watching their breed judging has equipped them with enough knowledge that they are qualified to become a breeder. I have often said that many of these breeders could not point out nor explain many parts of the canine anatomy and even how such specific parts interact with the rest of the framework on the dog in front of them. If they had the privilege and opportunity to learn alongside a notable, qualified mentor with excessive hands-on training, going over lots of dogs and observing movement then they would be able to discuss the anatomy and its interdependence with the muscle physiology vis-à-vis that particular breed's ideal skeletal construction. Lacking the basic fundamental principles can, and already has had, a damaging effect on many breeds observed today in the breed show ring.

Allow me to say that I am not without sympathy for those who do desire to be mentored but state they cannot afford to fly here and there or have the luxury to take time off work to study under their chosen mentor. I understand all too well the expenses incurred for such travel as I have journeyed a great distance to my mentors who were located nearly 1000 miles across the country. Via car it was a minimum of 16 hours each way without an overnight stop, or if flying, four airplanes, round trip, not including my drive of 4 hours to and from the airport. I know that justifying the time and expense to fulfill this obligation to yourself can be hard to explain to a spouse, especially one who does not partake in the sport of purebred dogs. But the question

that presents itself immediately is that if you do not have the time to take off from work or the disposable income to develop under a renowned breeder or judge then what time and money will you have to raise a litter of puppies that are properly reared and socialized? How much time will you have if there is an emergency and your bitch requires a C-section or, perish the thought, dies during or after birthing and you have to hand-raise a litter of pups on a bottle – unless you are fortunate enough to find a surrogate bitch who is experiencing a false pregnancy and letting down milk? If time or expense is an issue then the next scenario must also be considered. Are you prepared to keep all the pups in your litter if there are no suitable homes for the pups to be placed in? Consider the number of new

mouths to feed and their veterinarian care and add up the numbers. Can you financially absorb the expenses without sacrificing the well-being and care of your dogs? Remember, these dogs did not ask to be born.

And if you are fortunate enough to have the disposable income to have assistants whelp and raise your pups then the next immediate question is simple: why do you feel qualified to breed a litter when you have had no maturation under a respected, well-known and long-established breeder or judge?